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HOW TO DRAW & INK TREES & SHRUBS IN SILHOUETTE

with notes on Blocking in the Masses · Characteristic Growth · Contours & Edges · Brush & Pen rendering · How the Designer interprets

Nature · Tree silhouettes close to Nature · Decorative and Conventional renderings · Artist's and Designer's viewpoint · Helps & Suggestions.

by FREDERIC EHRLICH





SILHOUETTES OF TREES & SHRUBS

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FIRST EDITION

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FOREWORD

This portfolio of charts has been arranged primarily, for the use of students who are interested in knowing something about the elementary practice involved and the first steps necessary in the drawing of trees in silhouette. It is my belief, that if a good clear conception of fundamentals is first mastered, supplemented with careful observation, drawing and construction, the student will be better equipped to proceed and consequently a more rapid progress made. The difference between a very good silhouette and just a silhouette is a matter of study and background. The better the background of study the more valuable the result and the less need of copying the drawings made by others.

If these charts prove to be of help and guidance to the student or, stimulate the desire for thoroughness, my task at least has served a useful purpose and the time spent in their preparation has not been in vain. Sometime in the near future a second portfolio of charts will be published, wherein the silhouettes will be of the conventional type, as applied to block printing, pierced metal work, stencils, etc. In the meantime there is plenty of work ahead in drawing them close to nature, so that when the attempt is made to conventionalize them, the student will be thoroughly familiar with the characteristic shapes that nature offers.



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INTRODUCTION

Drawing a tree, plant, or woodland growth in silhouette is not quite the easy task the student imagines it to be. On the contrary it requires a technique and handling all its own. The silhouette of a tree, if it is to remain close to nature should preserve its characteristic growth, shape, contour, branch structure, etc. Drawing in silhouette is designing. It is far removed from rendering in pencil or water colors.

When the artist sketches a tree with the idea of rendering it in pencil values, he is trying for an effect of light and shade. He seeks an interesting combination of subtle tones in contrast to darker masses. He may vignette the outer edges of the tree until they fade into the white of the paper, or on the other hand he may be trying for bold snappy dashes of contrasting values. In each case he works in broad masses, makes use of those accidental effects of light and shade that will add interest to the sketch. He eliminates detail and sees only the general shape and the relationship of masses and tone balance.

When the designer goes to nature with the idea of rendering a tree in silhouette, he draws in two dimensions, he seeks shape, contour, growth. He thinks in terms of outline and flat values. He seeks truth and facts. The small irregular spaces between the branches and leaf masses are all important factors. Light and shade are of no concern. He sketches the tree in outline as it stands in dark contrast to the setting or rising sun, looks through the open spaces and sees countless number of branches, twigs and leaves, silhouetted against the sky.

Practice and experience has taught him that, when he attempts to delineate what he sees before him, some of the elements and details must be emphasized, others subordinated, and those that are of minor importance entirely omitted. The small straggling leaflets must be drawn into the larger masses, and with this, shape and contour must not be lost. All effects of light and shade are reduced to their simplest terms.

This is the technique of the silhouette. Generally speaking,

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there are two ways in which a tree can be rendered. One way is to render it with all detail and true to specie. The other, to merely suggest the general shape and characteristics of the tree. With this simplified handling, considerable detail, especially of the apertures between leaves, is entirely ignored, and the drawing considered an impression of tree growth rather than a careful study.

Language The silhouette of a tree naturally changes with the seasons. In spring and fall, branches and twigs predominate with but little leaf growth. As summer approaches each specie is sending forth characteristic leaf growth, developing into larger masses as the summer advances. The outside edges of each individual specie are gradually creating a pattern of curves, angles, or soft willowy effects. These variations should be carefully observed and with this careful observation the student will soon "know his trees." It is good practice and an aid to memory drawing, to go to the park in early spring, sketch any one of the smaller trees of simple branch structure, keeping the sketch within 7 inches in height. Draw only the trunk, main branches, and any of the secondary branches that are deemed necessary. Ignore the many little twigs that are scattered over the entire tree. After your drawing is finished, trace it on two separate sheets of paper, and repencil. Return to the same spot and in the same position several weeks later and sketch the new leaf growth on the second drawing. Then when summer is well advanced finish the third drawing. You will thus have a record of growth in three stages finished in pencil. These drawings should represent only the characteristic growth of the tree and not be a record of botanical exactness. Such practice leads you to observe and make note of, but what is most important, to remember.

The silhouette of a tree also changes in regards to the small apertures between the leaves. When a tree is silhouetted against a clear bright sky, considerable detail and a greater number of openings are seen than when this same tree is silhouetted against a dull grey sky toward nightfall, or with a background of other trees. In the latter case a good deal of the contrast is lost, many of the smaller openings disappear and seem to merge into the larger masses.

* Trees in silhouette serve a variety of purposes in the commercial and manufacturing field. They are used as headings, end pieces, or as decorative spots on the printed page. They are also used as designs for book covers, title pages and trade marks. In the manufacturing branches they serve as decoration on parchment and pierced metal shades, tiles, linoleum cuts, wood blocks and stencils, trays, pottery and china, tallies, place cards, score cards and as framed pictures.

When a tree is used as a silhouette design for the printed page, one is at liberty to use it either in all detail and remain close to nature; it may be an abstraction, or a highly conventional treatment. It is purely a matter of personal likes or dislikes, but when the silhouette is designed with the idea of using it as a motif in linoleum block printing, a considerable amount of simplification is necessary due to the process involved in cutting the block and the limitations imposed by the ma-

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terial. Then we have the silhouette that is purely imaginative in form; where the designer wishes to create a more or less fanciful arrangement and where decorative effect is uppermost in his mind.

When we approach the subject from this angle, we no longer deal with trees or shrubs of any named variety but as abstractions or ideas of growth; this growth to be persuaded to take certain lines of design or decorative shapes. The branch of a tree may actually be quite straight and exceptionally severe in natural growth, but because it furnishes an idea or motif for decoration it is brought into an ornamental state, by changing this rigid growth into rhythmic, gracefully curved lines, with leaf masses and twigs changed in shape and proportion to better serve the decorative effect of a free rendering, not enclosed within a given space.

Then again a tree such as the Elm is taken as an idea of growth; the long graceful drooping leaf formations of such trees as the Willow are added to the lower branches, creating a form which would not be a direct imitation of nature, but where human invention and imagination plays a part. Chart 24 shows several examples of this method of interpretation.

On the other hand the designer may not be thinking in terms of curves or elaborations, where realism will play no part, but where line and mass arrangement receives first consideration; the motif relegated to secondary importance and the resultant design so abstract in character that there would be little means of identifying the kind of a tree intended. The merits of the design would depend upon the question, is it orderly, well balanced and interesting with regards to line and mass composition.

To whatever degree your motif is conventionalized, or no matter how close you may stay to nature, the important fact remains that a knowledge of the shapes and characteristics of the various trees and shrubs is important. This would imply careful studies that lend themselves most readily to the designer's needs or those that give him the greatest inspiration in his search for the ideas that nature offers.

When going to nature with the idea of rendering the wonderful array of shapes and forms which she has to offer, when we seek inspiration from her great storehouse of suggestions that are always at our command, we must be prepared to bring something to nature in the form of preparation, drawing technique, etc. Nature will furnish the motif but she insists that the method of delineation shall come from the student. If our materials are brush, pen and ink, then we must know something about how these materials should be handled. If we are thinking in terms of "Silhouette," then limitations are immediately imposed upon us. The pen or brush will overcome those limitations only to the extent of our knowledge and experience in their use, with the control we have over them and the ability to make them do just what the mind dictates. This of course cannot be gained by reading. It means practice and application; trying again and again until that pliable tricky little tool with which we are working, will and shall, do as we wish.

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&MATERIALS &

The student should be equipped with the proper materials; the following will serve all purposes in the beginning of these studies. An HB and a BB pencil. A soft pliable eraser. Three number 290 Gillott Pens. A bottle of black waterproof ink. A number 2 and a number 4 medium priced red sable brush. Several sheets of ledger paper, and a blotter.

Use the HB pencil to block in the masses and the BB pencil to spot in the values. The 290 pen is an exceptionally valuable instrument, inasmuch as it will make from the finest kind of inked line, to an exceptionally heavy line or spot when pressure is applied. The pen improves with usage, but its life is none too long. Constant pressure and the spreading of the fine points tend to cause the pen to lose its elasticity and snap at any moment. The number 170 pen is also very useful and inexpensive. It is not quite as pliable as the 290 pen, will not make as broad a stroke and it is well to experiment with both. A "crow-quill" pen, although possessing a fine point, lacks the flexibility of the 290 pen and I advise against its use.

Regarding the brushes, do not buy a camel's hair brush. The hair is too soft, has absolutely no life and when used will not spring back to its original shape. A red sable brush is the only kind of a brush to use. It should possess a fairly fine point, the hairs should be flexible and immediately spring back to their original shape after being used.

A new brush is not recommended for inking in silhouettes. Brushes with points well worn down from use, make for the best results. The number 2 red sable brush is used to spot in the outline texture of the smaller drawings, and the number 4 for the larger ones, and to fill in the black areas.

Very few students are familiar with what is known as "Ledger Paper"* and yet it has an ideal surface for inking. In the tests that I have given this paper, I have found it to be superior, as far as toughness of surface is concerned, to any "Bristol Board" now on the market. It retains a much smoother surface after erasing and does not "pick up" with the pen, as does the Bristol. It is not quite as heavy in weight as a two-ply Bristol, and when a large surface is inked, there is a tendency for it to buckle, but its other advantages far outbalance this disadvantage If the paper should buckle, allow the ink to dry thoroughly, dip the entire drawing in water. Dry between two blotters and the buckle will have disappeared.

^{*}If your local dealer cannot supply this paper, it can be purchased at Cooper Union Supply Store, Seventh St. and Third Ave., N. Y. C.

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EXPLANATION OF CHARTS

Helps, Hints & Suggestions

If the student hopes to attain any proficiency in the art of rendering a tree in silhouette, it is most important that the pen and brush practice as shown in Chart 1 be thoroughly mastered. This elementary practice is of great value and the student will become aware of this fact as soon as the first tree is attempted. When the strokes are understood and the student feels that progress has been made, then Chart 2 should be carefully read and intelligently copied. While copying them, the student will realize the importance of having the brush in proper working condition, the hand in the correct position and know just what character the spot is to take. Is a spring-like growth to clothe the branches, a mass effect desired and in what direction are these masses to grow?

The brush should never be fully charged with ink, especially on the smaller sketches. The partly charged brush will always give a better texture and finish. The brush that is but slightly charged will give a more feathery edge and indicate a smaller leaf growth particularly, if the number 4 brush is used. As the brush holds but very little ink, it must be recharged frequently so that no change in the character of the edges will occur. When inking the branches the 290 pen will be found easier to handle than the brush and the stroke should be made in an upward, rather than downward direction. With the upward motion the pen and also the brush is gradually lifted from the paper, insuring a finer line at the end of the branch or twig; this is as it should be. With this style of stroke a more rhythmic and related branch growth is obtained.

The brush and pen are very often used in combination on the same drawing as shown on Charts 2 and 3. Here the smaller branches have been inked with the 290 pen. The first illustration on Chart 3 shows the rhythmic motion and clean cut effect that can be obtained with the upward stroke, with the hand kept well to the right of the drawing. On Chart 4 the branch of a tree is blocked in with an H. B. pencil. The light values as well as the dark values have both been finished with the 2B pencil sharpened either to a chisel point or rubbed down on a piece of paper until one edge has been flattened and broad strokes can be made. When tinting in the light value, do not neglect the smaller apertures and branch growths and be reasonably sure that the irregular shaped openings will show branch or leaf separations and not just holes indiscriminately placed.

Let us pass up inking for the present and study Chart 5 Here the same fundamental principles are involved and applied to the entire tree. Note how definitely and decisively the shape and characteristic growth of each tree is shown. In the lower portion of the chart the outside edge of the tree has been inked in with the

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brush to show that stippling motion of the brush is used to define the edges. The examples on this chart should be copied by the student so as to gradually understand the technique involved.

⚠ If the foregoing charts have cleared the way to a better understanding of the preliminary studies, inking in is in order. When inking the edges, begin at the left hand side, decide just what character the outer edge is to take and keep the same character throughout so that the right hand side will be in harmony with the treatment on the left hand side. The outer edge of the tree should not be inked beginning at the outline but should be started some quarter of an inch from the penciled line to give the brush a chance to get its stride; then gradually work outward.

♣ If the inking is started at the penciled outline and any mistake is made, it naturally would have to be corrected outside of the limits of the drawing, thereby changing the size and in many cases the entire shape and edge is hopelessly lost.

⚠ We now come to the charts showing the trees, shrubs and smaller plants in silhouette. They have been drawn to show the true shape and characteristic of each tree and are faithful interpretations of each specie as near as the limitations of a silhouette will allow. On these charts, facts have been recorded. These are shapes and forms that nature offers and with which the student should first become familiar, before making any attempt to elaborate or conventionalize. In some cases the same tree has been used several times. The reason for this is to show that although the trees belong to the same specie, they do not all grow exactly alike and that there are many different species belonging to the same family.

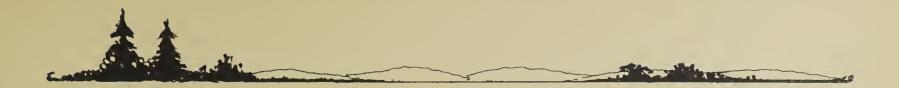
♣ When the attempt is made to draw these trees they should not be laboriously copied mark for mark and dot for dot as this would be a more or less difficult task for the beginner and would not serve the purposes for which they were intended. If the student was to make an exact copy of these trees with an eye for detail and exact reproduction, the possibilities are that there would be a tendency to forget the essentials to neglect the trees' general aspect, relation of masses, characteristics and growth. While thinking of detail the eye would be focused on one point, whereas in inking, the whole tree should be taken into consideration and interpretation of general character, branch and leaf formation attained. Even the experienced designer would probably be unable to draw two trees exactly alike. They would appear to be alike, but this would only be due to the fact that he had reproduced the spirit of the characteristic growth and shape. As far as detail of texture or rendering is concerned, they may not be alike.

♣ What then are these characteristics of growth that are so essential? First study the tree and then decide, or ask yourself these questions. What is the general shape or contour of the tree? How do the branches grow? Is there a tendency for them

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to grow downward, upward or at right angles to the trunk? Do the leaf masses appear to be separated, grow in clusters, take a vertical or horizontal direction? Are the edges soft and willowy, feathery, angular, or ragged? These are the essentials. If you recognize them, see that you emphasize them in your drawing and do not lose these essentials when you begin to ink.

Chart 22 shows the decorative character the silhouette assumes, when a white area in the form of a tree trunk is introduced as a foreground and the tree subordinated to a secondary position. Chart 23 shows a further application of the tree in outline as a foreground and various effects produced by the way in which the sky has been treated. The change that takes place in the examples shown on Chart 24 is due to an elaboration of growth and detail. The trees are still close to nature as far as growth is concerned but they have been brought into a decorative state by the manner of treating the contours and the branches.

The examples shown on Chart 25 reverse the process of black on white to white elements on a black ground, giving an entirely different contrast. This effect is produced by charging the brush or pen with show card white, on black show card stock. When using the white, first stir and mix the color in the jar, put two or three brushfuls on a sheet of paper, have the brush well charged with this color and with a fairly quick snappy motion, without pressure on the brush, apply the white to the surface. If the pen is used, a ball pointed writing pen gives the best results. Do not attempt to use the 290 pen. When using the white with the pen it will be necessary to thin it down just a trifle. If, after the white is put on the pen with the aid of the brush and it will not mark, it means that the consistency of the color is too thick; if it drops off too readily you will know that it is too thin. Experiment until you get the color to the right consistency. When the color is once applied to the paper and has dried, difficulty will be experienced in trying to go over the part a second time. If a mistake has been made, rather wash the color out with a brush and clean water, blot it, repeat the operation until all traces of white have disappeared. Allow to dry before making a second attempt.

Chart 26 will give the student an idea of how a tree can be arranged within a given form. Very little change has been made as far as growth is concerned, in the drawings marked with the circle. They are merely silhouettes of trees, portions of which have been cut down so that they will conform to the geometric shape enclosing them. The only design that can be attributed to them is the balance of the space and mass arrangements. The tree designed within the octagonal shape, and the first two at the bottom of the chart, are merely symmetrical arrangements, based on tree growth.

Charts 27-28-29 give the student a very good idea of how a tree can be used as a foreground in a problem of space cutting, without any practical application in mind. When the foreground plays so important a part in the composition, and the

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motif has been reduced to its simplest terms, the only other consideration that need be given is the middle distance, and in many cases it is just a balance of foreground and sky. Compositions of this nature are far more valuable in the study of balance and space cutting on account of their simplicity, than those the students usually design in which roads, houses, fences, fields, ponds, etc., are introduced. When these are shown in perspective, the beginner soon finds that the problem is becoming very much involved.

- Chart 30 shows how these foregrounds can be used in a practical way. Here they have been used in the designing of covers where trees can be used as a motif. The first consideration must be given to the balance of the lettering, the position it is to take, the number of words that must be used, and if the copy can be consistently separated. The balance of the lettering and the composition must go hand in hand. Never plan any composition without considering the lettering. So many students think only of the tree or landscape and then try to fit in the words wherever the space will allow trusting to luck that it will fit. If this is attempted, it will naturally throw the entire mass of lettering out of balance or necessitate the division of the copy.
- When a tree is placed directly in the center of the space as in the first arrangement on Chart 30, the place for lettering is limited to the lower portion; number 2 allows for lettering in the upper and the lower portion of the design. In number 6 the lettering can be placed in the upper portion because of the black area; number 7 again limits the lettering to the lower portion. Number 8 allows for considerable lettering in the foreground. Number 18 shows how difficult it would be to properly balance the lettering, when the landscape was uppermost in the mind. It will be observed that some of the designs allow for a white margin around the landscape, while others are designed right to the cutting edge. Both are correct.
- If the student should wish to finish the individual trees, or the foreground arrangements in less contrast than black and white, I would suggest as the first experiment a brush full of Show Card black be mixed with a small quantity of white, to a middle grey value; paint in the tree with this grey. The contrast will then be reduced just one half. If more white is added, a lighter tone results. If a small quantity of light blue, yellow ochre, or yellow green, be added to the grey a more interesting and warmer color will result. These combinations can be tried on white, cream, tan, or light grey stock and the color changes noted.

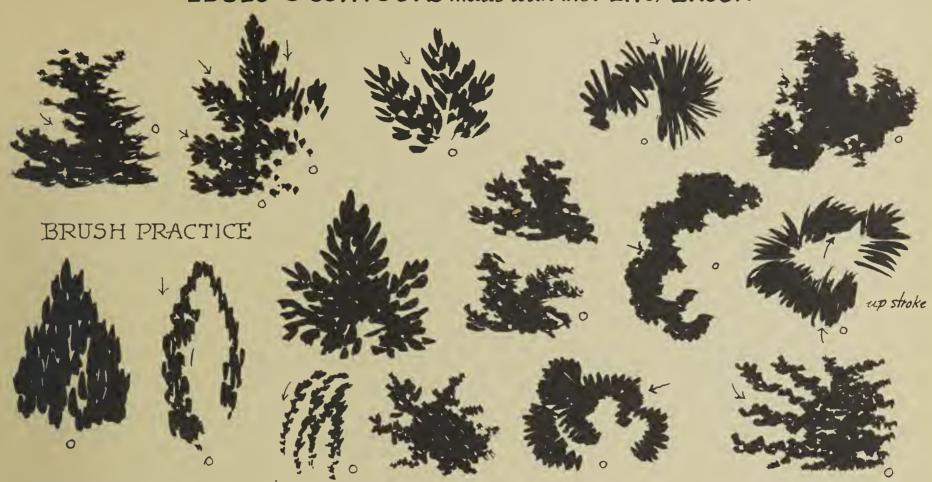


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· EDGES & CONTOURS made with the PEN or BRUSH.



Before attempting to draw the trees in silhouette, these brush strokes should be practiced. The student will notice that with a certain control of the brush, many interesting exaccidental effects will result. This is not so much because of the handling, but due to the peculiarity of the brush exits characteristic marks. The o indicates the position of the hand while inking, & the arrow the direction of the stroke.



Effects similar to the examples shown above, are produced by first charging the brush with very little ink, then lightly thump the point of the brush on a piece of paper to separate the brist-ols, and with a fairly rapid motion, but with perfect control, try for marks similar to the above.



These strokes are made with the No 290 pen. Note the clear & crisp edges. When this effect is desired use the pen, when a softer or more of a mass effect is required use the brush.

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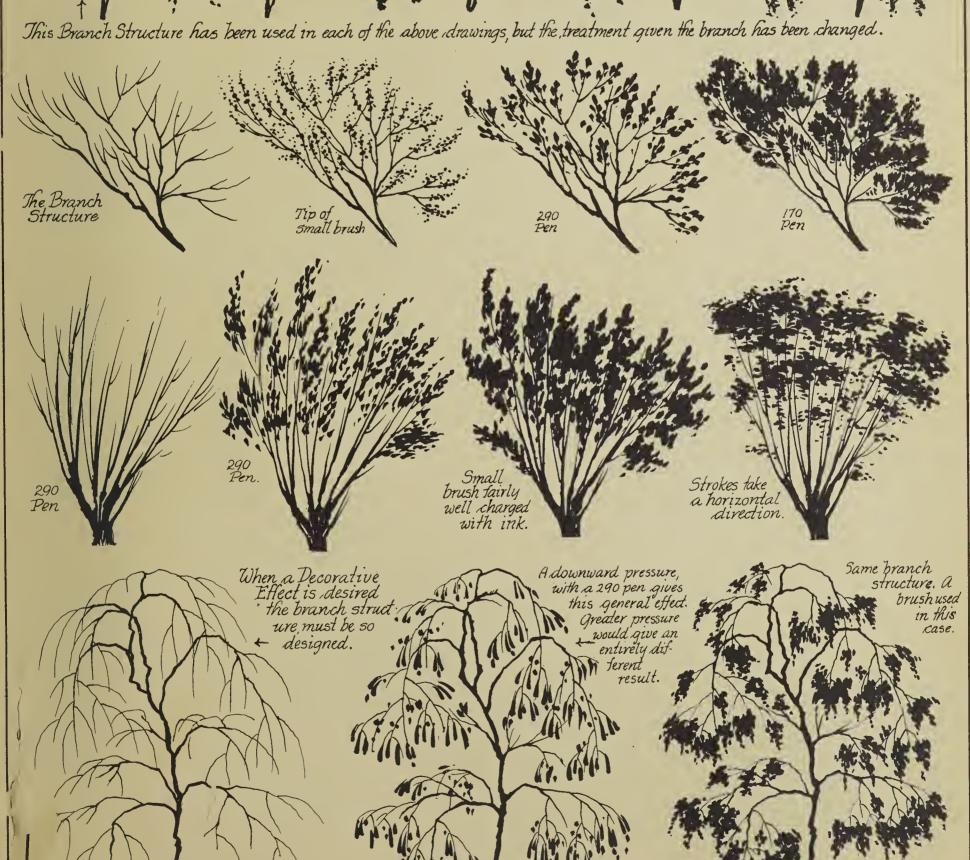
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The BRANCH and the various EFFECTS PRODUCED according to the TREATMENT given the motif.

Showing the change that takes place in the general appearance of a branch, when the treatment or technique is changed to gain a desired effect. The pen gives a clean, crisp, snappy effect, while the brush rendering, gives a softer effect.





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BLOCKING in the MASSES · interpreting the EDGES & the SECONDARY STEMS ·



Sketching in the general shape the same branch, suggesting of the branch, leaf mass & stems. a leaf mass, with soft edge effect.

Light tint over the same branch, suggesting

Here the light tint suggests a leaf mass with rounded edges.

This branch suggests a rugged needle like growth.



Method of defining the edges & shape of a branch, with main stems indicated.

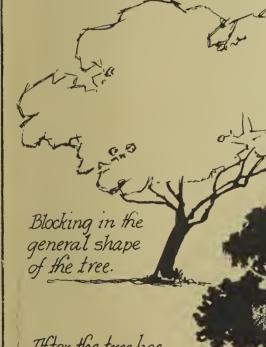


Open spaces in the leaf mass should be indicated at the branch structure, and near the edges.



The finished drawing showing the position of the spenings, of the secondary stems added to the main branch.

Main Branch structure





wen blocked in the outer should be inked in interng the genera! appearance in leaf & branch formation.

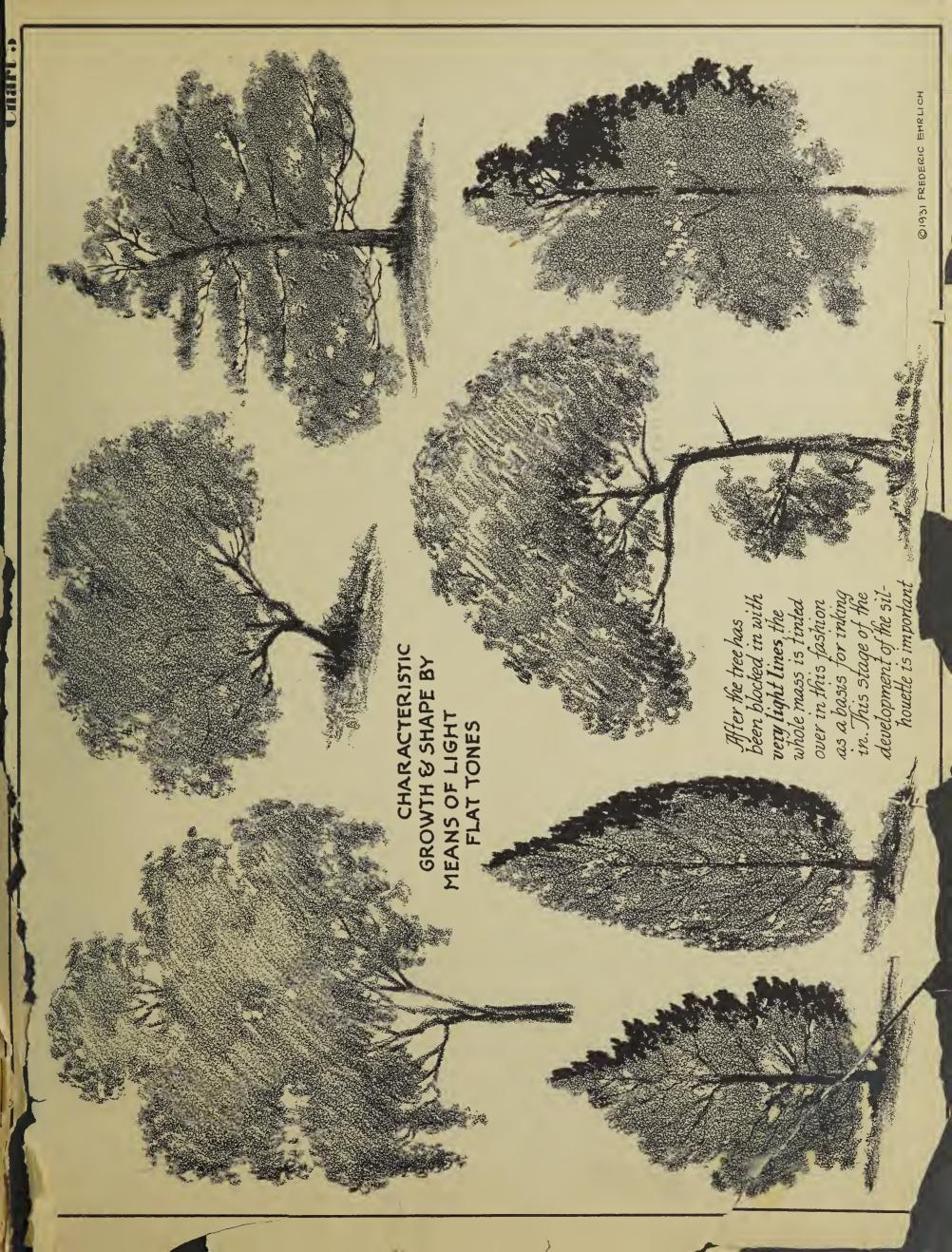
The outer edge of this tree, shows an entire ly different character, due to the handling & position of the brush while inking



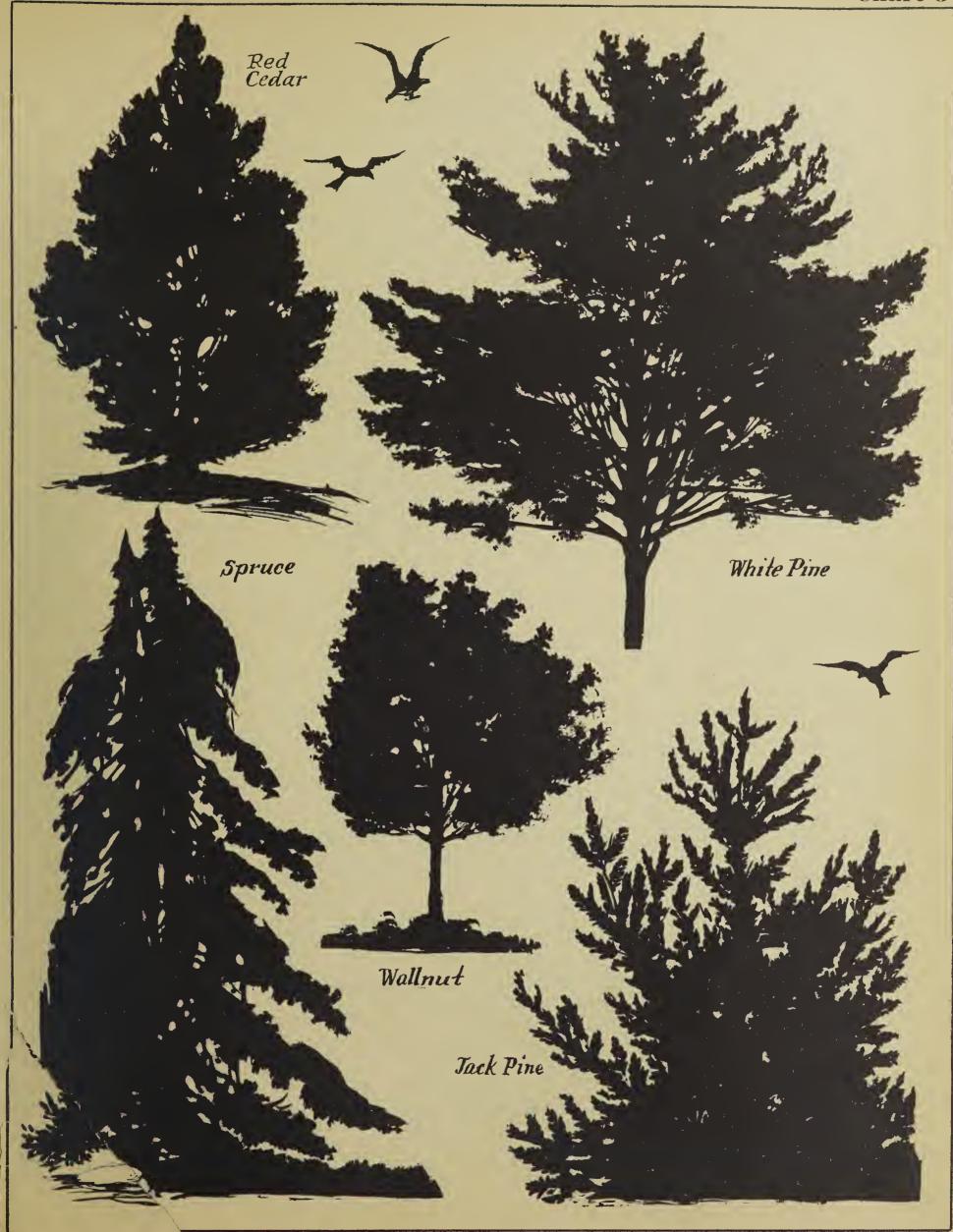
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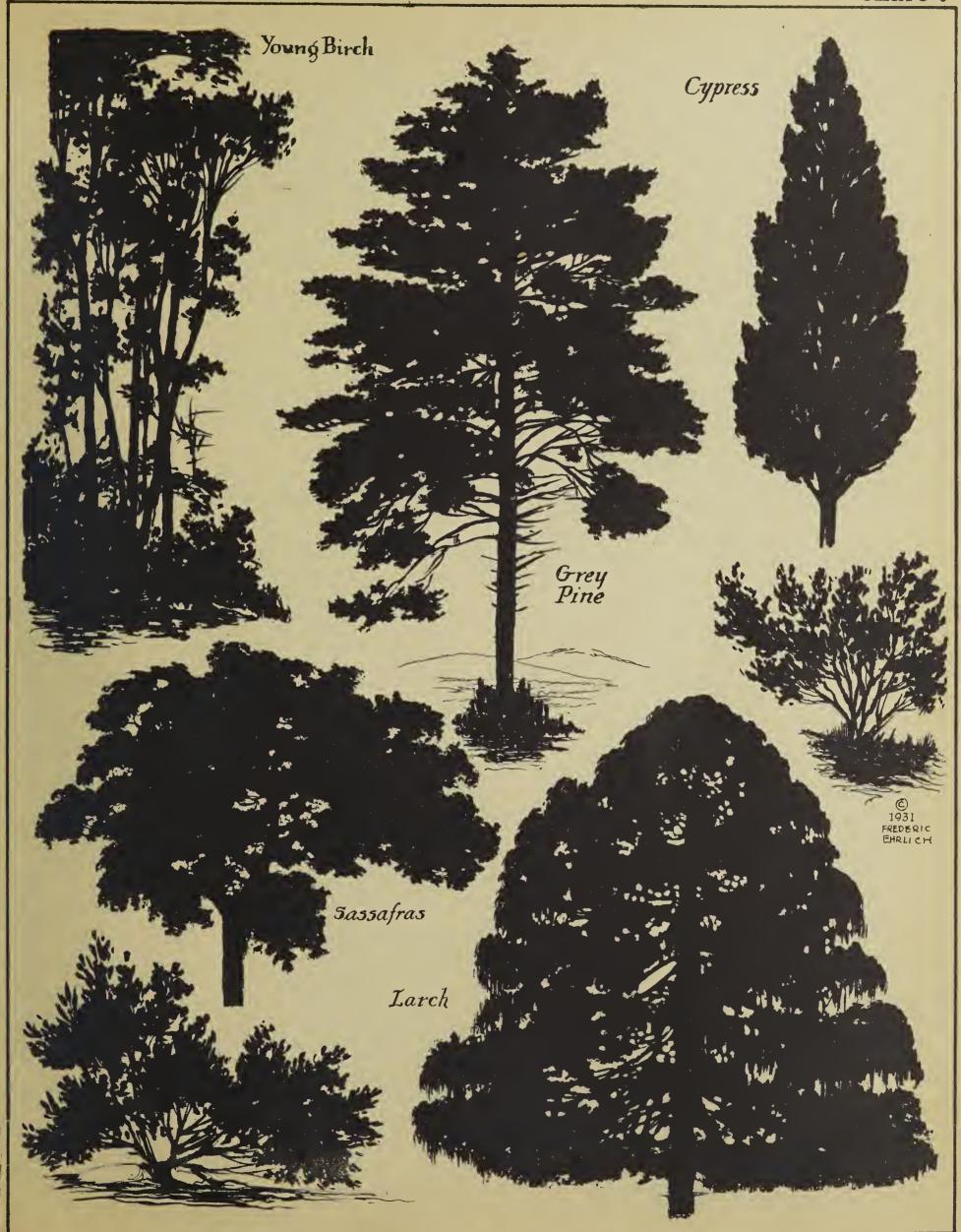
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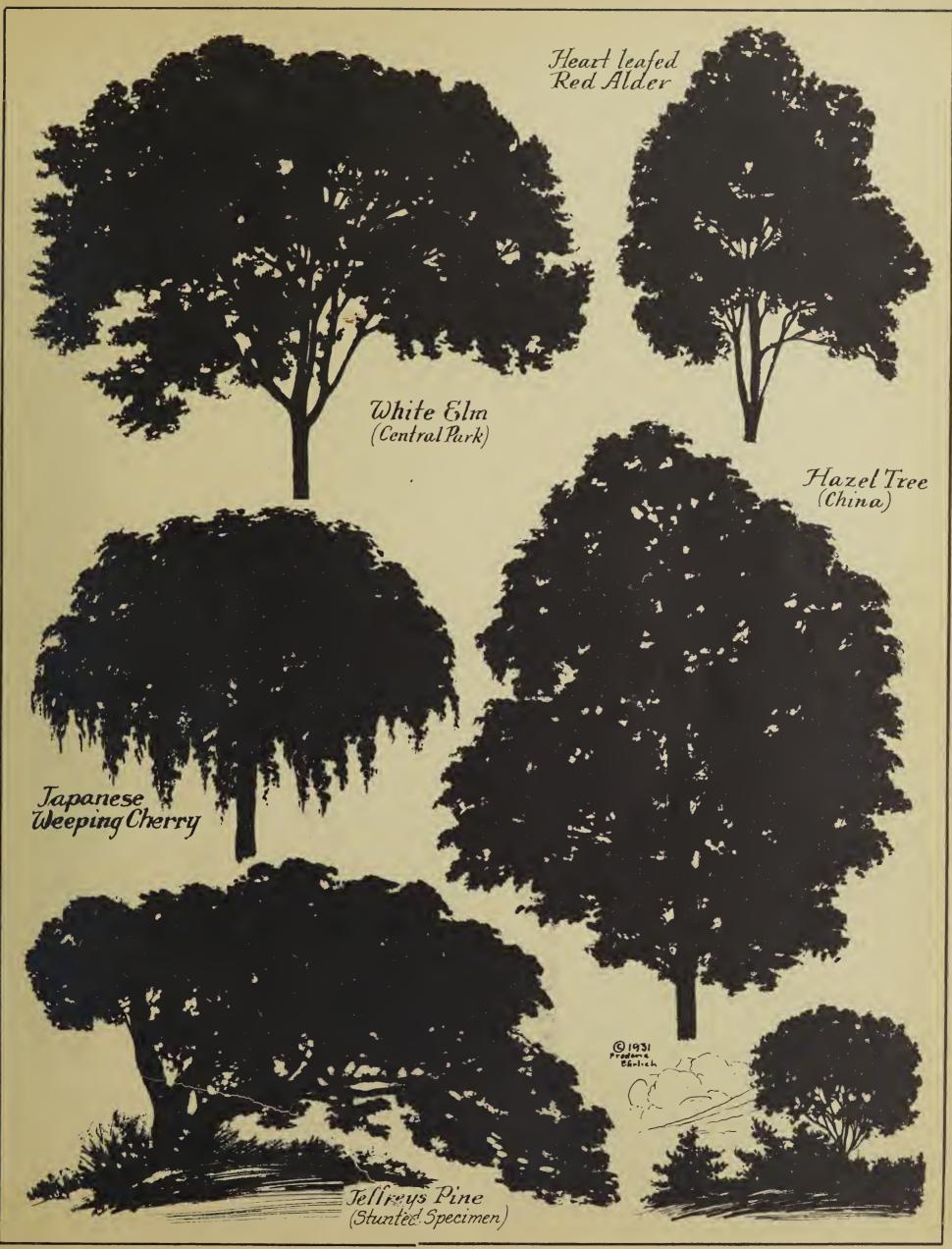
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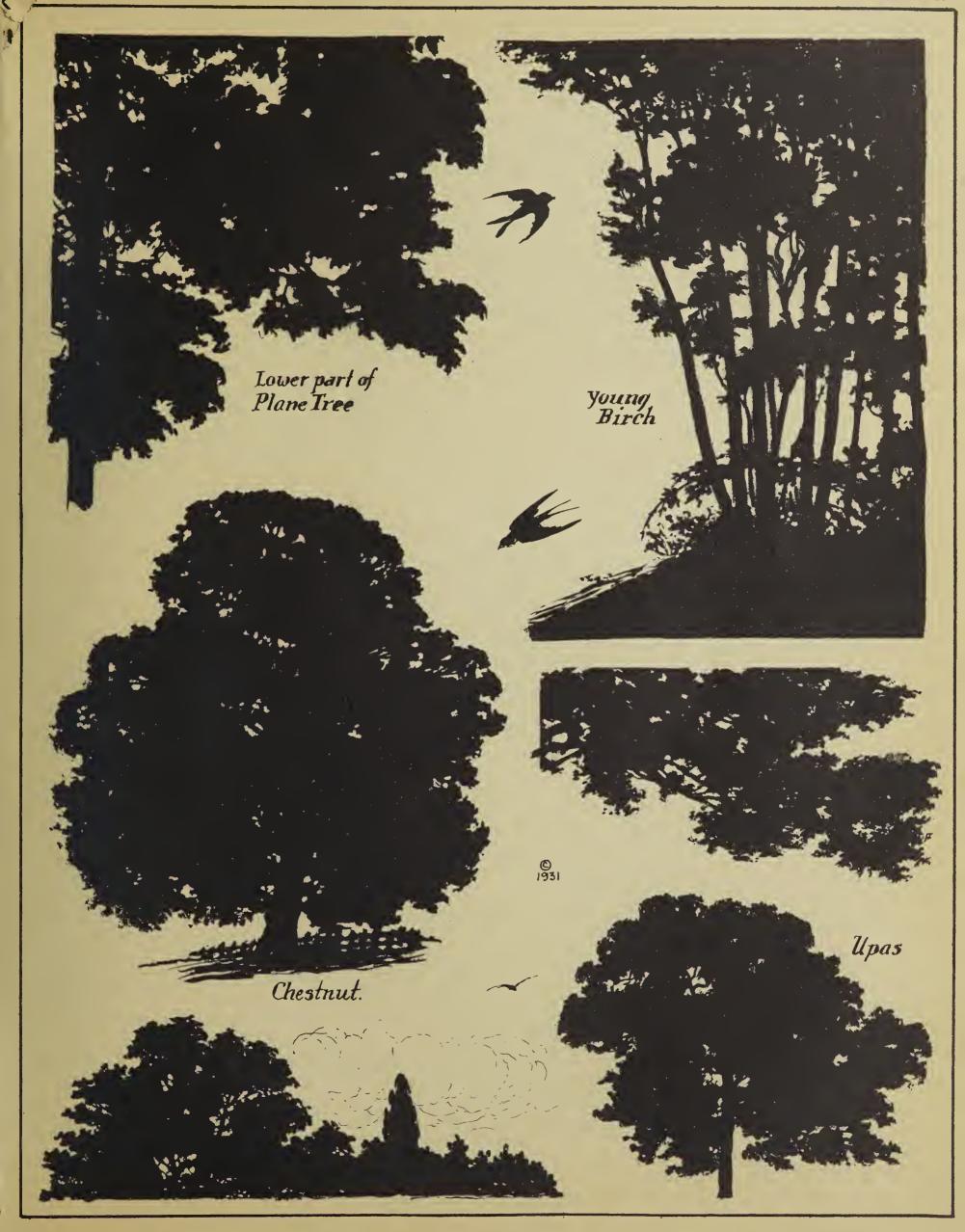
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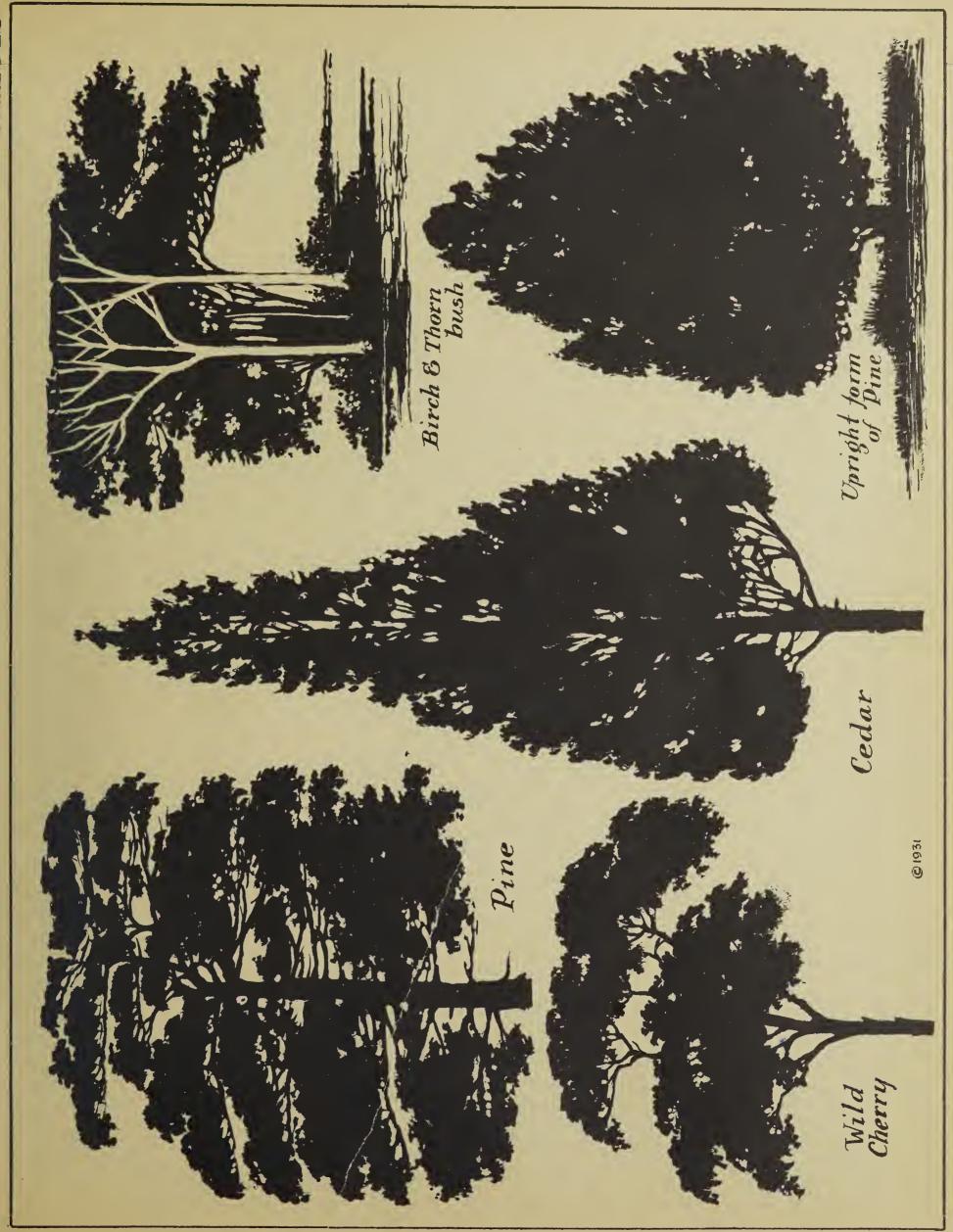


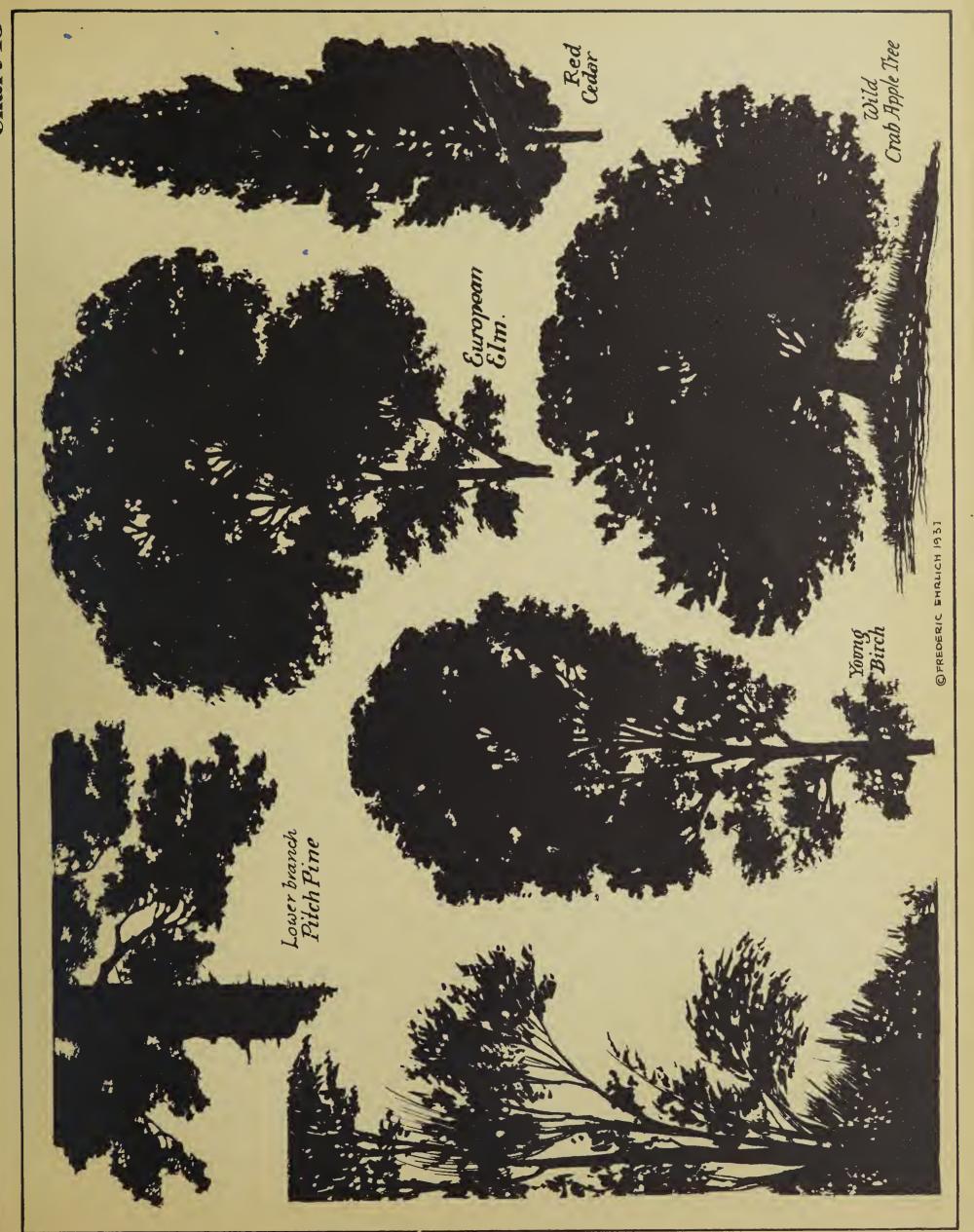
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SILHOUETTED effects in BLACK and in WHITE

If an effect of snow is to be indicated, tint in the sky, with short light strokes, keeping far enough from the branches to show the white of the snow. Use those tress, that retain their leaf or needle like masses throughout the winter months. If a deciduous tree is used, show only the trunk & branches.





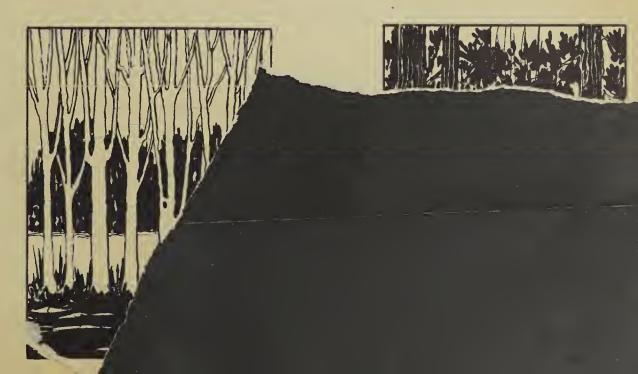














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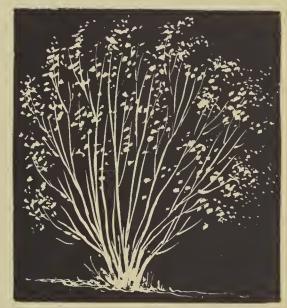


·WHITE ON BLACK STOCK.

















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·TREES in SILHOUETTE designed within various GEOMETRIC SHAPES

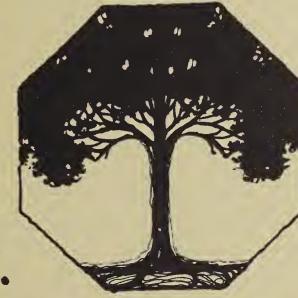








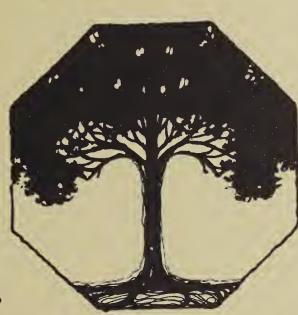




















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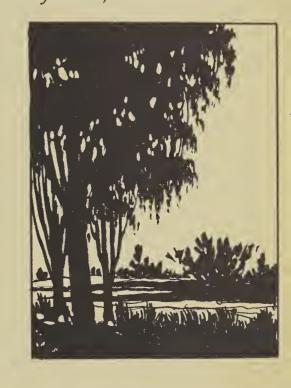
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ARRANGEMENTS where in the SILHOUETTE is used as a FOREGROUND

In these arrangements the larger masses are near the top, due to the shape of the tree selected. The tree can be drawn true to specie, or be a mere abstraction of tree growth, close to nature.





















SILHOUETTES as a FOREGROUND Continued.

On this chart the trees are again used as a foreground, but due to their entirely different shape, the eye is kept more to the foreground than to the top. The arr. in the last row, show how the trees may clominate the entire foreground, or only part of it, according to the effect desired or demanded.

















9 1931 Frederic Ehrlich



ARRANGEMENTS wherein the SILHOUETTE is shown in the MIDDLE DISTANCE

Trees can also be indicated as if they occupied a position half way between the foreground and the distance. The higher the foreground line is indicated, the more of a hill is shown, & the greater the angle, the steeper the hill. Those marked • show the middle distance in a horizontal direction.



















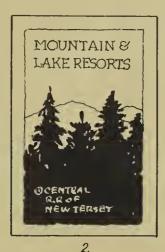




FOREGROUNDS in SILHOUETTE and their APPLICATION to designs for COVERS

Possible arrangements for Cover Designs, where in the Foreground plays an important part. The Compositions have been reduced to their simplest terms, so as to be in Harmony with the Silhouetted treatment of the tree & foreground











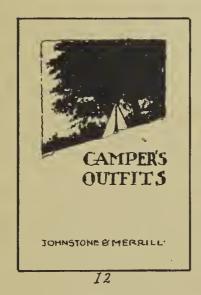


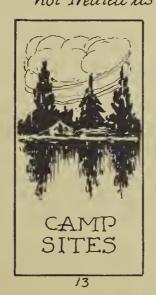














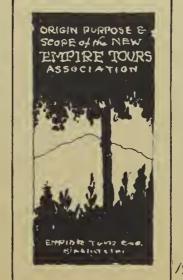


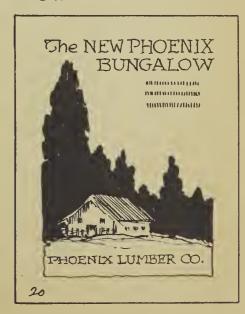
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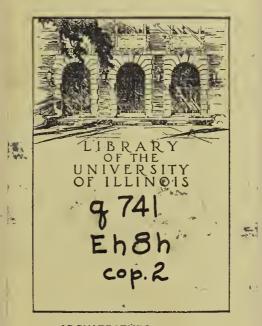








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